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POEMS

THE SONG OF LIFE

LANIER



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THE SONG OF LIFE

BY
JOHN J. LANIER
Fredericksburg, Va.



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INTRODUCTION

ONE day my friend, Lieutenant Edward R. Platt, saw *The Song of Life*, which I had bound into a little book, lying on my desk and asked me to let him read it. After reading it he returned it to me with the following note:

My dear Lanier:

I see the good thing that you have sought to do; and I perceive that your argosies have returned with the Golden Fleece.

Where all are good, comparison were invidious, but *The Menagerie*, *The Stoic*, and *The Mystic* have the magic of true music; while *The Light Burns Down* is as exquisite as a cameo.

My richest wish for you, dear Poet, is that you shall follow the Pipes o' Pan until they shall lead you to stand within the empyrean and wear the amaranth of the victor.

Faithfully yours,

PLATT.

It is this commendation by my friend, in whose ability as a judge of poetry I have confidence, that has decided me to publish this little book of verses.

The Author,

JOHN J. LANIER.

Fredericksburg, Va.

Feb. 15, 1919.

THE SONG OF LIFE

The Song of Life is not a miscellaneous collections of poems but an organic unity. No poem, therefore, should be judged save in connection with the whole, which is a poetic and symbolic interpretation of life.

PROEM

I

The song of life I sing !
The glory of our youth
When love is king !

The war the soul doth wage
To live eternal truth !
And make
The discord and the strife
A harmony of life !

II

This is the song I sing !
For poets know and feel all things
That we have ever felt before,
Or dream in our imaginings !

They lead to distant lands,
O'er stormy seas and desert sands,
In search of hidden lore.
Onward ! where they have gone before,
They lead us on forevermore !

YOUTH

The songs of Pan I sing !
Who makes the glories of our youth
When love is king,
And breathes the spirit that uplifts
The souls of those who loves his gifts
And his commands !

THE PIPES OF PAN

I. THE COMING OF PAN

In this enchanted hour!
Lend ye, O moon and stars,
The magic of your power
To the conspiracy of Pan!

For now the Sun god comes
In every glade and glen
To kiss
The Spring to life again!

And bring the great god Pan
Who soon will piping come
To waken love
In heart of maid and man
Since time began!

II

The Sun god banishes
The Winter into nothingness!
And as it vanishes
The Spring enthralls the world
By her eternal grace and
Loveliness,
But not more fair than maid!

For then, 'tis said,
There comes the Pipes of Pan
Sounding through wood and vale,
That never fail
To snare the heart of youth,
By the sweet magic of the maid,
Whose hand in hers is laid!

Then hail! All hail to Pan!
Who piping comes to wake
Love in the heart of man and maid,
And make
Her love answer the love of man
And then — !

O moon! O stars! O gentle wind!
O nature splendor robed and
Glorified!
And man and maiden deified
By Pan,
Lip answering lip with love divine
Since time began!

III. A GIFT FOR YOU, MY LOVE

While in my heart I was divining
A gift for you, my love, to-night,
I saw in heaven's airs reclining
Some angels fairer than the light.

In dark eyes much deep love expressing,
Uprose the tallest and began :
“ This gift from heaven goes confessing
The love the angels bear to man.

“ Since love's the secret power moving
The soul of all things here above,
With all your kind and sweet approving,
We make the heart of this of love.”

A soft robed angel spake, revealing
More her thought with eye than word,
And naught her thought with word concealing,
What with applause the others heard.

“As love is sweetest love when bounded
With links that make it ever sure,
The heart of this must be surrounded
With meetest emblem of the pure.”

Then said another angel rising,
Possessed of youth forever young,
The words to suit her thoughts devising
In softest accents of her tongue:

“Since love’s that pure must live forever,
As doth her fair twin sister, truth,
From this our gift we must not sever
The emblem of eternal youth.”

Love, youth, and purity expressing
In one gift passing fair, they boast,
Which puts beyond all doubt and guessing
That which the angels love the most.

“This gift,” said they, “shall be a flower,
Soft pillowed on the level mere,
Its head above green leaves shall tower,
And lily will we call it here.

Its heart of gold shall be exposing,
Its calyx leaves the richest green,
Its petals to the earth disclosing
The purest white that e’er was seen.”

The snow tint from their bosoms taking,
So white and pure in heaven’s air,
They to the petals gave while making,
Creating thus the lily fair.

“ The white and gold and green combining,”
Said they, “ bear this blest emblem true,
Of pure young love in one entwining
The lives and loves and hearts of two.”

And when I see the lily blowing,
The angels’ fair created gift,
I feel my heart within me glowing,
And to my love my eyes I lift!

And to her gaze the lily showing,
Its sheen of white and gold and green,
When in her eyes comes love’s light flowing,
Of angels all I crown you queen!

IV. THE SERENADE

For you and me
The glowing twilight throws
Her beauty o’er the earth and sea,
And clasps in her fair arms
My soul filled with the sweet alarms
Of all your charms!

O come, my love!
For heaven is with stars abloom,
And mingles with her shining light
The rose's blushed perfume
For you and me tonight!

O come, my love!
For soon the moon will rise
And veil the starlight eyes
That shine in heaven blue,

But not dim thine
For when they shine
There is no night for you
And me!

v

O ministering spirits of the night!
Steal round our path with flowers strown,
From meadow green and mountain height
Trooping your forms with graceful zone.

But let them come with harp in hand,
Prepared with nature's tuned sound,
To sing and peal with joyous band
The beauty of the world around.

O see, my love! from far-off land
Of orange, lemon, cocoa tree,
The shining spirits round us stand
And tune their lutes for you and me!

From misty ocean's bluest wave
They come with dancings airy light,
From silent island, grot, and cave
They stand mysteriously bright.

They come from moonlit shore
Of tropic isle low rocked in blue —
O love! such forms of radiant hue
Were never seen before
I first saw you!

VI

Now in the circling ring
The Dew begins to sing;
Her arms are bare,
Draped with her golden hair.

Her swift light fingering
Flies on from string to string;
O listen, love, the minstrelsy
She sings for you and me.

As the lengthening shadows
Creep,
I bring on the soft blown wings
Of sleep
New life for everything:

For the shrivelled blade of
Grass
That would wither and fade away
Alas!
At close of day;

For the leaves that shimmer in
 Their shining sheen
Of purple and gold and green
 They glimmer in;

The rose I wake with a kiss,
 And open
The beautiful eyes men miss
In the soul that is hidden
 In everything.

VII

Ah, love, her song hath ceased!
And now the spirit of the flowers
Glides from the snowy breasted band,
And charms the swiftly passing hours
With airs known only to her land,
And thus she softly sings:

My realm, undiscovered by
 Telescope,
More beautiful far than on
 Poets ope
A bright world of inspired
 Thought,

Doth swing far beyond the
Pleiades,
A star-lighted world that
Seer ne'er sees
In his rapt lone visions
Wrought.

I reign there in state and
Perfumes make
The fair fashioned flowers
Thirst to slake
With the richest scented
Draught.

And thus in the light, and thus
In the gloom,
The air is all filled with rich
Perfume
By the distillations of my
Craft.

And oh! a great wonder it is
To see
The myriad bright hues there
Made by me
In a low wind's changeful
Rhyme,

For the decking of the flowers
Born
Just at the blest time before
The dawn,
Ere the morning light begins
To chime.

VIII

Blest spirit of the flowers,
How swiftly pass the golden hours
Your sweet enchantments bring!

But see, my love, in yonder ring
Come dancing nymphs from leafy shade,
In rainbow gossamer arrayed,
To hear the South Wind sing.

Her dark eyes flash and shine
Like thine,
Her voice grows sweet and strong
As swells the music of her song.

I bring the velvet greens
And purple sheens
Out of the southern seas!
And then
I spring on bounding wing
Away! Away! All day!

And dance and play
Among the grass and trees
And over the waters low!
And gently trip
The blushing rose's lip
To kiss!

The red, red rose I kiss!
 Ah, bliss!
For when her lips I kiss
All lovely thoughts come
 Everywhere
I roam the rounded sphere

 Among the scented vines!
The music of the whispering pines!
 The starlight and the flowers
 With honeyed nectar
For sweet bees in fairy bowers!

 O! everywhere
The earth enchanting spreads
 To where
A youth for love a maiden weds!
 Ah there
My softest pinions veer!

And spreading wide them find!
Ah them I find!
Their lives I bind
With love and flowers twined!

On this glad night!
Pour out, O moon and stars,
The glory of your light!
And blow, forever blow, ye winds
The love that sends
The youthful heart which sings
The everlasting beauty of
These things!

The glory of the waving sea
For you and me!
The music of the blowing wind
For you and me!
The stars from heaven bend
For you and me!

The mountains and the vales,
With hidden ferns in mossy dales,
For you and me!
The grassy plains and diamond dew
With shining suns shot through
For you and me!

When God made these for you and me
He placed the titles in our hands
Of more than royal sceptered thrones
Endowed with richest lands!

O love! poor is the crownèd king
Of vastest realm,
Though boasting armies and the mind
Which could the world o'erwhelm,
To those who find
That nature's God to them hath flung
The poet's soul, harp strung,
Which makes the things we see
A glory and a melody
For you and me!

THE BIRTH OF MANHOOD

THE BIRTH OF MANHOOD

From sleep, or more than sleep, we wake,
If sleep or dreams we call those times
In which we know ourselves as that
Which most resembles shadow things,
As through the mist of years we plunge.
The rising sun awakes new life,
From death of youth to manhood's strife!

Ah! we can ne'er forget the day
When all our dreams took wing and fled!
The scales from off our eyes were dropped,
And we saw others as they are —
Red-handed, heartless, demon things!
How life has changed to us since then:
The past is past, the future stings!

To learn this early is not well —
A child in years, a man in thought,
Means sleepless nights and shipwreck oft.
But think of gifted Chatterton,
The poet boy who died a youth!
The curse of knowledge cradled him,
Some never wake and learn the truth!

Thus, with the dawn of manhood's life,
We see with sorrow's eye tear dim,
Dark something of a future grim!
We see our days of pleasure fled,
The joyous, buoyant, boyish days
That make of life a carnival —
No more are these when youth is dead!

'Tis then we wake as from a dream,
And peer into the future years
With longings wild and deepest fears!
We see in them both joy and pain.
Such joy as we have known before?
The coming years whisper: "No more
Lost joys come back to us again."

But youth cries, "Let them go, new joys
Will come as these have done before."
High hopes, illusions, fire the hearts
Now of this eager restless throng.
Each some vain phantom will pursue
Which he will worship as a god,
But worshipped now to curse ere long!

In vain the prayers of all the saints
To all the powers throned on high!
Sweet innocence appeals in vain,
Still rends the air its piteous cry!
Ah what avail for man to rave?
Alas! Herculean efforts fail,
And heroes sink into oblivion's grave!

O false, thrice false, mirage of life!
It holds enchantments to the eyes,
It cheats the ears with siren songs,
It spreads delusions out to man
That fool and cheat and mock and lie!
How they rejoice with demon laugh
To damn us long before we die!

Our youth is dead to-day! To arms!
Our manhood calls for greater things
Than we have ever dreamed before!
It shall not call in vain! Away
With false alarms and demon charms!
The world is old but we are young,
The world shall be as young as we!

Then drink we to eternal youth,
To youth renewed from age to age!
Which wars against all ancient wrongs,
All hoary blood red tyrannies,
And modern vested infamies!
God make us one of every tongue,
Our manhood keep forever young!

MANHOOD

The war the soul doth wage
To make
The discord and the strife
A harmony of life.

MANHOOD

I

A man must mark his course in life
And hold it ever 'gainst all odds!
Gaunt poverty and ice-eyed death
And ignorance and heartlessness
Are but the goads that urge us on!
A man, that is a man manlike,
Must love the strife and want to fight
The fight that nature deals his soul!
And if we conquer, it is well;
And if we conquer not, 'tis well.
We live the life a man should live!
Success is not the goal of life,
To play the game for what it's worth
Is all the great Jehovah asks!

II

And when I think of those heroic souls
Who yield allegiance only to the right,

But still must feel the venom of the world,
I hear their mighty hearts and voices chant:
We thank thee, God, that thou hast made us so
That neither fate, nor man, nor demon damned
Can take all happiness from out our hearts,
For thou hast planted in our inmost souls
A castled citadel to which we fly,
And there defy the armies of the world
To make us what we have not made ourselves !

III

They find the secret of all life who learn
From pomp of wealth and folly's pride to turn,
For happiness that hangs on outward things
Is but the tinsel life from her lap flings.

They lose the joy of life and sorrow reap
Who think that happiness is what we keep,
Give us this day our daily bread, we pray,
And find our joy in what we give away.

IV

They say that pity is akin to love!
Away with such kinship! They are no kin!
No more than earth bound ostrich is
To eagle soaring in swift majesty,
Lone breasting the thin air where never leaps
The forkéd lightning's wild red wingéd play!
Thus ever soareth love, born of the sun,
Despot of hearts, grand architect of life!
Nor hath life labors we would not endure
To quaff, O love, thy heaven nectared sweets!
But is defied the power of all men,
Or fickle fate, or brutal circumstance,
To make our hearts cry out for pity's tear.
Nay more! that e'er could make endurable
The pity of the angels bright as stars!

MY SOUL AND THE SEA

MY SOUL AND THE SEA

I match my soul, O Sea,
With all the wonder and the mystery
 There is in thee!
For tho winds blow and waves do roar
 With all their power,
My ship sails to its destined shore
Of England, France, or Singapore
 At its appointed hour!

I match my soul, O sea,
With all the majesty of thee!
 For O!
When storms o'er thee do sweep,
And the fierce lightning flashing!
Ah then it is I love thee most
As all the fury of thy waves come
 Lashing!

For tho they rush and roar
And stir so vast a seething
That their convulsive thundering
Is like offended deity fierce

Breathing!

I match my soul, O sea,
With all the might there is in thee,
And sail my ship
To its predestined shore
Of England, France, or Singapore
At its appointed hour!

I love thy mighty soul, O sea,
Thou hast revealed to me
In all its wonder and sublimity!
For drinking in thy turbulency
Roaring!

Thy surging spirit's giant force
Into my heart comes wildly
Pouring!

Then most thy power in me stirs
 Its deepest mysteries,
And fills me with such ecstasies
 And blest infinities,
That my soul, too, a boundless
 Ocean is !

 Ah then it is
 I match my soul, O sea,
With all the might there is in thee !
For tho winds blow and waves do roar
 With all their power,
My ship sails to its destined shore
Of England, France, or Singapore
 At its appointed hour !

PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE

THE MENAGERIE

The silence of the night now reigns
Throughout the vast menagerie's wide walls.
Oft have I seen it by fierce daylight gleams
When life and appetite and restlessness
Shine in the eyes of creatures iron barred.

But blessed sleep, in easeful lap of dreams,
The Ostrich hath afar transported home
Upon the burning desert's scorching sands.

The Eagle screams, his Alpine home regained,
Bathes his gold plumage in his native realm,
And, glory crowned, amidst the snows he reigns,
The sun's fierce splendor mirrored in his eye.

The Hyena's prison bars are loosed,
He roams his native haunts all dank with gloom,
The grave-yard's silent haunted homes of death
He prowls among, and feasts on dead men's bones.
'Tis well, some men best serve their end when dead,
And these nocturnal feasts hyenas hold.

The seal no more in mimic ocean swims,
The fish doled out by tantalizing hand;
The ocean's wide expanse he roams in peace,
Exulting in his new born freedom found;
On every finny tribe he whets his taste,
And arctic icebergs know him as of yore.

Far roams the lion the Algerian plain
In all his untamed strength and lordly mien,
And while the majesty of heaven falls
Upon the soul with all the vastness of

The stars, the desert, and the coming night,
The dreaming lion leaps upon his prey.
But iron bars his headlong spring soon stopped —
The lion roared in baffled pain and rage!

How like that baffled, cagéd, roaring lion,
Waked in wild pursuit of falsest dreams,
And then in frenzied fury beats himself
'Gainst iron bars that iron still will be,
There lives another caged creature — man!

Down! down! wild thoughts that fill the brain!
Out! out! unholy passions of the heart!
Cry, down and out, as much as we may please,
But passion cagéd creatures are we still!

In wildest flight that genius e'er has known,
I hear the cries of great men iron caged!
I hear the throbbing of their white heat thoughts
Seethe in the cauldron of their flaming souls
That blaze the way through trackless wastes
To larger life for which we dream, alas,

To wake in chains of caged captivity
Forged, in the crucible of destiny,
By time and fate and brutal circumstance.

'Tis then the venom'd demon of despair
Comes measuring the might of crushing folds
With high born souls of gifted men and great!
The moguls, monarch ones of thought and deed,
Who with the lightning of their radiant minds
Flash meteoric splendor o'er the earth,
And show what image God intended man to be!

Thou dost disdain to snare the common ones
Of earth, with foreheads low and soulless eyes,
For their despair is but despair of men.
But searchest through all ages and all climes
For victims worthy of thy cunning guile,
And hurlest them into thy dungeon keeps.
The horrors, fits, and pangs thou givest them
Is all despair, the agony of gods!

But snakey sorceress, despair,
Thy forkéd tongue and glaring eyes of hate
Cannot forever hold, with damnéd spell,
The giant ones; for they will pull thy fangs,
And blind thy eyes, and crush thee dead in dust,
And roam the green orbed earth in triumph free.

But oh! the gifted weaker sons of earth,
Death poisoned by thy cobra venoméd fangs,
O weep, ye cycled ages, o'er their graves!
Weep o'er them, weep! ye cycled ages weep!

THE STOIC

Beneath the shade of venerable oaks
An aged stoic lived ; alone he dwelt,
And gazed unmoved on ever changing sky,
And mountain scenery that round him smiled
With myriad tint and swaying loveliness.

Laughing childhood, youth with purpose high,
And toil worn man with age drawn nigh to close,
Passed him unheeded with the slightest glance.
His only occupation was to muse
O'er ancient sage's hoarded wealth of lore,
Or, when the fancy seized him, wander out
And half the night in aimless wanderings spend.
Nor joy nor sorrow seemed to know his breast ;
He lived from day to day and year to year
To feeling too unknown to care to die.

O stoic of the doubly icy heart,
I see thee yet, as on that awful night,
When howling storm on wintry blast
Did fright both man and beast to terror dumb.
In thy library sat I listening to
The wondrous dreams of poets born,
And naught knew I till thee, the storm, and night
Together came: 'twas then I heard thy tale.

“Aye, those, who knew me in life's early morn,
Saw in my face the home of brightest smiles,
My laughter born of purest springs within,
My soul formed when the stars their power lent
To recreate a human thinking man
In the heroic mould of ancient days.

“The ardent, yearning, godlike qualities,
That light the soul with fires caught on high,

Burned in the secret chambers of my heart,
And voiced themselves in kindling flashing eye,
The heaving breast and nervous quivering frame,
Which constitute the true masonic signs
That do reveal the starry child of light
To kindred souls — for him none others know.

“ Then youthful dreams of highest hopes,
In giant strength, seized all my eager soul
That burned to plummet to life’s secret depths,
To seize her gems of purest truth and worth,
And set them blazing in the shining world.

“ I plunged into the herd of heatless men
With full as sensitive and loving heart
As ever wept another mortal’s woe;
The springs that open wide the gates of joy,
And flood the soul with her emotions deep,
Oft opened as I viewed my smiling kind.
I knew them not, and happy never known !

“For aye, I was a fond and dreaming fool
To hope for joy in such a curséd world
Where men on others’ ruin build their fame!

“Too soon, alas too soon, I learned to know
’Tis sharpest pain to deeply feel and know,
And saddest souls are those who truest know.
The very things that give us highest joy
They bring our hearts the deepest pangs of woe,
And he who would not suffer torturing racks
Must on the realm of bliss bar well the gates.

“To steer between these sirens of the soul,
And fix a middle flight from either reft,
Denotes a mind of godlike grasp and strength.
For years and time and knowledge of my kind
Have made the marble statue of the grave,
Unchanged save with the knowledge of the right,
The true ideal of my ripest thought.
For such an one can battle with the world
And move a martyred king unto his grave,
And peaceful fold his robes for silent sleep.”

THE MYSTIC

Down in the deep blue dark unfathomed sea,
A wondrous pearl lay fair, lost long ago.
Remembrance of that pearl still lived with men,
Of golden ages that had blessed the earth
Before the pearl was lost in the deep sea.

A sybil old had said: "Who seeks this pearl
Must never yield to doubt or fear or pain;
For if he backward turn or yield to these,
The sea will yawn and gulp him fathoms down,
The food for grim eyed monsters of her caves.
And he must brave the terrors of the deep
In such frail skiff as sails the placid wave
Where ever blows the wind her softest gales."

Amid the mountain vales there grew a youth
As pure as a snow plant that blooms in spring,
Whereon none but the angels ever gazed.

And when he heard the sybil's prophecy,
"That fate is mine," he said, "I sail the sea."

In darkness and at midnight's holy time,
When elves and fairies hold high carnival
And seaward gently blows the rising wind,
His skiff with silken sail slid from the shore.
No food took he, no water and no wine:
The great invisible did nourish him.

He sailed the seas where warm winds ever blow,
And shining pearls beneath blue waves are hid;
He cleaved the wind and wave and storm and cold
Swift as a disembodied spirit does.
His hair grew white as snow, his frosted beard
Did drape him as a silver cloud of mist.

.
Soft flew his bark o'er wreathed curled frothy
waves,

Five hundred leagues he left the sea behind.
From out the vasty deep strange voices called —
A meteor shot through the northern skies!

A savage rumbling sound rolled o'er the waves
From men who agonized by their deep woe,
Had vowed as offering to the salt sea
The mariner first coming to their shore:
And then would be restored the priceless pearl,
The pearl long lost in darkest deepest sea.

.
The sea cried, give me back the pearl! the pearl!
But inland, distant on the mountain tops,
He heard the hymns of all that are to be
Singing in gladness of deliverance.

Then to the wind he gave his silken sail,
And shoreward clove the sunlit tinted waves,
And flung the shining pearl far through the crowd.
The multitude was rent this way and that,
Some cried the pearl! the pearl! and some the sea!
Some say the sharks leapt forth with glist'ning
fangs,
And some that angel wings flashed through the air.

THE LIGHT BURNS DOWN

They hear the whirring of soft wings,
The hush of lovely silent things
That softly float
In dreamland's boat
From sun-kissed shores of memory !

THE CHOIR INVISIBLE

At his death all the nations of the earth mourned
but the choirs of heaven rejoiced.

—*Epitaph of a musician.*

I. THE LIGHT BURNS DOWN

Before a soul that's dead we stand !

It follows us through every land,

But nowhere can be found

When—the light—burns—down.

Then comes that dread first time

When we do feel deep sorrow's iron hand,

A laugh then pains with jarring sound

When—the light—burns—down.

The soul fades as a frosty rime,

While we do roam, alas, in every clime

For that which nowhere can be found

When—the light—burns—down.

II THE CHOIR INVISIBLE

Ah ! he, who would thy blessed music hear,
Must wake in stillest night and steal anear !

For thou no more in light of day doth sing
Though worshippers bring richest offering.

But seated on thy waving throne in air,
Fanned by etherial winds, without a care,

Thou singest in the choirs of the sky,
Unheedful of a mortal standing nigh,

Who hears the magic of thy wondrous song
That echoes of high heaven's court prolong !

Drawn by thy music's witchery of sound,
The spirits of the air with me draw round,

Imploring thee, with radiant seraph glance,
To softly sing the angel heaven dance!

O thy wayward, changeful, and elusive art!
It soothes the aching pain and charms the heart!

It makes us scorn the jibes of every fate!
And with a heart triumphant and elate,

Unflinching! we welcome any thing
The darkest night of life to us can bring!

No more! no more! can terrors of the night,
Nor cringing fears of day the soul affright

That hears the magic of the mystic song
Thou singest to the trans-Jordanic throng!

Thy message down the ringing ages send
Till all the worlds to thy great power bend;

Breathe thy transforming spell upon the earth,
Thy song sing on from nation's birth to birth!

THE END



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